

Choke Factsheet

Update April 2020



In horses, choke is an obstruction of the oesophagus (food pipe), unlike in humans where it refers to an obstruction of the trachea (windpipe). This is a fairly common condition but rarely life threatening.

Clinical Signs

1. Food material/saliva from both nostrils
2. Difficulty swallowing
3. Stretched out neck
4. Coughing
5. Inappetence
6. Occasionally a lump may be felt on the left side of their neck



Diagnosis

This is usually based on history and clinical signs alone. If in doubt, a tube can be passed up the nose and into the oesophagus to check for an obstruction.

Treatment

- Most episodes of choke will resolve without veterinary treatment
- If not, sedation and anti-spasmodic drugs help to relax the oesophagus and shift the obstruction into the stomach.
- A nasogastric tube can be passed to identify the location of the obstruction.
- Flushing with water via the tube can help to soften the obstruction and move the food into the stomach.

- Difficult cases may require admission to the hospital where an endoscope can be used to image the oesophagus

Complications

Aspiration Pneumonia: Horses may inhale food/water material into their lungs. This may lead to signs of aspiration pneumonia over the following 24-48 hours, including fever, cough, increased breathing rate and coughing. Contact your vet immediately if you are concerned.

Stricture Formation: Rarely, choke will result in scarring of the oesophagus and formation of a stricture (narrowing). This can be difficult to treat and may result in repeat episodes of choke. Anti-inflammatories are often prescribed after a prolonged episode of choke to try and reduce the chance of this happening.

What to do if you suspect choke

Keep calm and remove all food and water. If the choke has not resolved within 30 minutes, please contact us.

Prevention

1. Ensure feed is well soaked
2. Feed chaff to greedy horses to try and prevent them bolting hard food.
3. Horses with dental pain may not chew food thoroughly, increasing the risk for choke. Ensure regular dental exams with a vet or qualified EDT.

Please see our website or call reception on 01622 737884 for information about our Wednesday morning dental clinics.



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